

19 January 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Probable Communist Reaction to Release of POW's

1. In our opinion, the Communists do not regard the disposition of the POW's as a matter sufficiently important to justify the renewal of hostilities in Korea. This was demonstrated when they accepted non-forcible repatriation arrangements during the armistice negotiations. It was also demonstrated when they made a de facto acceptance of the ROK release of 27,000 prisoners in mid-June prior to signing the armistice. On both occasions, the Communists protested at length and attempted to conceal their loss of position. They did not, however, permit the POW issue to prevent the negotiation and signing of armistice agreement.

2. We believe that the withdrawal of major Chinese Communist forces from Korea, the announcement of long-range Communist plans for rehabilitating North Korea, and present Soviet and Chinese Communist emphasis upon domestic programs are evidence of a Communist decision not to resume hostilities in Korea. Recent Communist tactics concerning the POW's appear to have been designed largely to exert pressure on the Indians and to conceal the prestige losses the Communists suffered on the POW issue.

3. The Communists probably estimate that any attempt to seize the 20,000 Chinese prisoners while still in the neutral zone would lead to a renewal of hostilities with UN forces. At best it would probably result in conflict with Indian troops, which the Communists almost certainly wish to avoid. Hence, we believe that the Communists will not make such an attempt.

4. The most likely Communist actions will consist of disturbances by Communist agents among the anti-Communist prisoners. These disturbances may occur while the prisoners are still in Indian custody, or during or after their transfer to UN custody. The purpose of such disturbances would be to give substance to the Communist contention that pro-Communist prisoners have been forcibly retained.

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5. Release of the prisoners to civilian status by the UN command will be denounced by the Communists as a violation of the armistice agreement, and will probably become the subject of extensive propaganda. The Communists might use this as a justification for actions on their own part violating the armistice agreement, such as a strengthening of their military position in North Korea. They might also use it as a reason for refusing a demand for the return of UN nationals whom they still hold. We do not believe, however, that the Communists will consider the release of prisoners, taken by itself, as a development requiring a major alteration of their previously determined policy in Korea.

SHERMAN HUNT
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